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PLACE

Memphis, TN

DATE

March 2, 1988

H. E. Baker

(INTERVIEWEE)

Charles W. Crawford

(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
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"RECOLLECTIONS OF THE MID-SOUTH"

INTERVIEWS WITH
MR. HENRY D. BAKER

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD
TRANSCRIBER: J. DOUGLAS SIMS
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE PROJECT IS "RECOLLECTIONS OF THE MID-SOUTH." THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 12, 1987. THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. HENRY D. BAKER. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERISTY ORAL HISTORY OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY J. DOUGLAS SIMS. INTERVIEW I.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Baker, I'd like to ask you what you remember about McNairy County back when you were a boy. You were born in 1889?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What is your birthday? What day?

MR. BAKER: January the fourth.

DR. CRAWFORD: Oh, you've already had it this year.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was your ninety-eighth?

MR. BAKER: Yes. I was ninety-eight years old, January the fourth.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, did you live on a farm?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I lived on a farm.

DR. CRAWFORD: How far out from Selmer was it, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: Two miles. Two miles out from Selmer.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet the way the town has grown, it's pretty close right now. Has Selmer grown a little?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I guess so. I haven't been there in a long time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I have not been there in a while either, but



I know it's got more people than it used to have.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was the county seat back then, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes. I remember the first automobile that come to Selmer.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you find out about it?

MR. BAKER: I heard there was going to be one there, somebody had gotten an automobile. I went then to watch to see it and everybody else was arrived, all over the streets there watching them drive down the street. First time they'd ever see an automobile drive.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did people think of it when they saw it, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: They thought it was wonderful. It run without horses.

DR. CRAWFORD: [Laughter] It didn't need any hay, did it. Where did they get their gas in the early days? When that car came in, I know they didn't have any service stations.

MR. BAKER: I don't know about that, where they got the gas at. I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: What were the streets like in Selmer then? Did they have any of them paved.

MR. BAKER: No. No, they weren't paved.

DR. CRAWFORD: That had to be a car that would go on rough roads, then, didn't it.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when the first time was you ever

rode in one?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember the first time I ever rode in one.

DR. CRAWFORD: By then you were used to them, I guess.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would you say a lot of people came out to see that first car?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes, they was all up and down the street there, watching it go by.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a real curiosity, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Sure was. The car would run without horses.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know if you were out of school then or in school?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember. I was a schoolteacher along there in McNairy County for a good while.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was the name of the school, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: Oh, I taught in little country schools out about three or four different places around. We'd have two months in the summer and three months in the winter.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that to give people a chance to work in the crops?

MR. BAKER: Yes. They had to work a normal farm, you know. It didn't hurt just to have two months in the summer time after the crops was laid by, I reckon, and in the winter while they wouldn't work on the farm, they had three months of school for the children.

DR. CRAWFORD: But I'll bet they didn't have school in cotton-



picking season, did they?

MR. BAKER: No, they had to be out then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you teach in any log schoolhouses or were they all boards?

MR. BAKER: Well, some of them were log schoolhouses, just log schoolhouses. Just one room and [they] had a stove right in the middle of it. Heat for a wood stove, heat to build a fire in.

DR. CRAWFORD: And I'm sure they didn't have any electric lights, did they?

MR. BAKER: No, no. No electric lights.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have any kind of lights or did you get along without them?

MR. BAKER: Just daytime was the only time we had school and we didn't have any lights. Didn't need lights for the school.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess someone cut the wood for the stove, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes, we had brought wood out there cut by the cord, piled up out there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who built the fire in the school?

MR. BAKER: I'd get to school early, a little ahead of time and build a fire and have the room warm time the children came in.

DR. CRAWFORD: You got there some cold mornings, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess most of the students walked to school,

didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes, they was all right close to the school.
We just had a school building in every neighborhood around there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did any of them ever ride horses or come any other way?

MR. BAKER: No, I doubt that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Just walked?

MR. BAKER: Just walked to school. They was all close.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember the names of any of the schools where you taught?

MR. BAKER: Oh, I don't know. Bethesda, it was one, right close. I don't remember what the names of them were now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Baker, did the pupils have paper tablets or did they use slates?

MR. BAKER: They just used paper. They had paper tablets.
Yes, I think so.

DR. CRAWFORD: They'd already come in by then?

MR. BAKER: Yes. We had a blackboard up there. They'd get up there and write on that blackboard.

DR. CRAWFORD: What subjects did you teach? I guess you taught arithmetic and reading and things like that?

MR. BAKER: Just reading and writing and 'rithmetic. And a little history. And a little geography. That was all.

DR. CRAWFORD: How many grades did they have? How far did the

school go?

MR. BAKER: Eight grades. I don't know now. They studied 'till they went through the geography and history and geography was the main thing, and arithmetic. And we didn't get into algebra and things like that. Just arithmetic.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was for high school, I guess. For the ones who went on.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was there a high school in Selmer then?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I think so.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did you stay when you were teaching school? Did you board somewhere or did you go from home?

MR. BAKER: Board somewhere with one of the neighbors and they give me a room to stay in, close to the school.

And sometimes I was close enough [or] the school was close enough to me that I could walk from home and go to it. Be about three, three or four miles away, I could walk to it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I guess you went home on week-ends, anyway, didn't you, when you boarded?

MR. BAKER: Oh, yes. Generally went home on weekends.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'm sure it was good to spend some time with your parents.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: They didn't have any school buses while you were teaching, did they?

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Students had to get there themselves, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Just had to get there themselves. The ones that lived close in the neighborhood was all that come to it. We had about twenty-five or thirty children, maybe.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you had to teach all of the grades, didn't you. One through eight or whatever.

MR. BAKER: All the grades. Starting with the ABC's.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, was it hard to keep order in the school?

MR. BAKER: No, it wasn't any trouble. I went to one school one time where they had some great, pretty good-sized boys in the school, and they had a woman teacher before me, and they run her off, some way. She had to quit before the school was out. They got me to come then and I didn't have any trouble with them at all.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you have to do to keep order?

MR. BAKER: Just ask them to be quiet and stay there so, and I never did have any trouble with any of the children keeping order. They always minded me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I guess when they saw you talking to them, they were kind of afraid not to behave.

MR. BAKER: I guess they were.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have pretty good textbooks then?

MR. BAKER: Good textbooks? What do you mean?

DR. CRAWFORD: For geography and history and everything like that?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes, yes, we had textbooks just like we have now, I reckon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember if the state paid for them then or

did pupils have to buy their own?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember, but I think they had to buy their own.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe that's the way it was then.

MR. BAKER: I think they had to buy their own.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'm not sure just what year that was. And you worked there, in Selmer. And you worked on a farm, too, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes, I worked on the farm.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, what was that like on the farm, Mr. Baker? What crops did you raise?

MR. BAKER: We just raised cotton and corn and wheat and stuff like that. Oats. We raised, well, corn was mostly what we raised.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was the main crop?

MR. BAKER: That was the main crop. We'd have hay and we had the horses. We always had horses, you know. We had a barn with a big loft in it where we'd cut hay and haul up and put up in the barn loft for the winter time. Always kept a lot of hay there for the horses, and had a crib full of corn. Give the corn, get it all in. When I wanted to have our meal, I'd go down to the crib and shuck corn and shell it and carry it to the mill, have it ground into meal, bring it home.

DR. CRAWFORD: You'd take a sack of corn to the mill?

MR. BAKER: Sack of corn to the mill.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you take it on a horse or in a wagon?

MR. BAKER: I'd take it on a horse, drape it across the horse's

back and get up on it and ride the horse to the mill.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well Mr. Baker, did you pay the miller with money or did he take a part of the meal?

MR. BAKER: He took a little out of the total of the corn. The mill was built on a creek that run by and it run by water. Had it turn the water through on it make it run. Run the mill by water.

DR. CRAWFORD: It had a mill-wheel then and the water would run through it. Did you have to ride far to get to the grist-mill?

MR. BAKER: No, not far. A mile or two to get to the mill.

DR. CRAWFORD: Then you'd have to wait a while for him to get around to grinding your corn.

MR. BAKER: Yes. Waited for him to get through and grind it. take out his toll and then put the rest in the sacks and then come back home with a sack of meal.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that would last you for a while, wouldn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now what was the hardest work that you did, cotton or corn or hay?

MR. BAKER: Well, I don't know. Now most all I did was plowing. I didn't do much hoeing. The women in the field done most of the hoeing of the crops, used the hoe. I just done plowing. I drug the horse and the plow.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, now, let's see. You used horses, not mules, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Horses? Yeah. We had horses. Had a mare.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have a two-horse cultivator, or did you just use one horse?

MR. BAKER: Well, we had a mowing machine that run with two horses and we'd cut the hay and two horses pulled the machine. And things like that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have a rake then?

MR. BAKER: Any what?

DR. CRAWFORD: A horse-pulled rake? How did you rake the hay?

MR. BAKER: Yes, oh yes. Horses pulled the rake.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had quite a bit of machinery, didn't you? The rake would leave the hay in rows, wouldn't it?

MR. BAKER: Rig it up in rows.

DR. CRAWFORD: Then what would happen? Would you come by and shock it, put it up in shocks?

MR. BAKER: Yes, put it up in shocks. We'd load it up in the wagon and put it in the barn loft. The barn there and the loft there, up above the stables, you know, and the loft up there. We would throw the hay all up there in the barn loft and we'd have a big loft full of hay. Feed the horses through the winter.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was hard work, wasn't it, Mr. Baker? Lifting that hay up in the barn.

MR. BAKER: Yes, it was hard work.

DR. CRAWFORD: And on the wagon. I've done it. Well, did you just fill up the barn or did you put any hay in stacks.



MR. BAKER: No, just in the barn.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever bale any of it?

MR. BAKER: Oh, yes. We did. We got to where we'd bale hay.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have a baler or did you hire someone to come in with one?

MR. BAKER: Let's see. I don't remember now about... Had somebody to come in and bale the hay, I think. Had somebody come in and do that. We'd have somebody to come in and make molasses. We had a crop of sorghum.

DR. CRAWFORD: And somebody would bring a mill?

MR. BAKER: And they'd bring a mill, yes. Bring a mill in and put the pan down and dig a trench along there and set the pan over it and build a fire under that pan to cook the stuff and a mill with horses to it where they'd grind the cane up and get the juice, put the juice in there and cook it and make molasses. We had a crop of sorghum.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that good?

MR. BAKER: Yes, it was good.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet it was good with biscuits, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: We always had a barrel of molasses there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you had molasses and you had cornbread right there on the place.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you butcher any livestock? Or did you buy meat?

MR. BAKER: Well, we always had hogs. We raised hogs all the time. And we have killed a calf. Killed the calf



for beef, killed a yearling calf.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you made almost everything you needed right there on the farm, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes, that's right. We made everything. We hardly bought anything from the store.

DR. CRAWFORD: There wasn't much you needed to buy?

MR. BAKER: Oh, a little sugar. We had to buy a little sugar and a little coffee. Something like that. About all we had to buy.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'm sure you had a garden on the farm, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Oh, yes. We had a garden. We had fruit trees, and an orchard.

DR. CRAWFORD: It sounds like Mr. Baker had a place where they had everything they needed. Fruit and vegetables and molasses and veal.

MR. BAKER: That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: What direction out of Selmer was the farm?

MR. BAKER: We didn't buy anything much.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you wouldn't need to. What direction out of town, Mr. Baker, was the farm?

MR. BAKER: We always had lots of chickens and hens and we'd get lots of eggs. We'd take eggs to town and sell them.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet they didn't bring much money a dozen, did they then?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember now what they was a dozen. But it wasn't much. It didn't take much money to buy



something in them days.

DR. CRAWFORD: I remember my mother used to sell eggs when I lived on the farm, and finally, this was probably World War II, they got up to sixty cents a dozen, which was the best we'd ever heard of.

MR. BAKER: I just can't remember now what we sold them for, but we sold eggs. And we'd carry chickens to town and sell them, too, sometimes. About all we bought at the store was, the women folks would have to buy a little calico and something or other to make clothes with out of. They made their own clothes. And we had a loom out there and we wove and made cloth.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that's pretty good. Not all the places did by then, you know.

MR. BAKER: No, not all of them did, no. We had a loom there. We had the things on it there. She'd stick the thread through there and weave it up and make cloth out of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that was left over from early times.

MR. BAKER: Homemade cloth. Make our clothes out of it. I wore clothes back then made out of that homemade cloth.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you didn't have to spend a lot of money in the stores, then.

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't spend much money in the stores. Very little. Just to buy a little sugar and a little coffee we had to have. That didn't cost much.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now it's changed. The grocery stores now, you

know, do a lot better than that.

MR. BAKER: Oh, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: If everyone lived that way, the grocery stores wouldn't do as well. What direction was your farm out of Selmer? Was it toward Adamsville or on this side, or what way was it?

MR. BAKER: Well, it was about south from Selmer. Towards Stantonville, out that way.

DR. CRAWFORD: I have been south from Selmer going towards Corinth, Mississippi.

MR. BAKER: No, it didn't go towards Corinth.

MR. BAKER JR: This goes towards Chattanooga on Highway 64. That was near.

DR. CRAWFORD: Kind of east of there?

MR. BAKER: Yes, it was east of Selmer.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's pretty country. There's some hills there as I remember.

MR. BAKER JR.: Yes, well, Highway 64 goes through Selmer. I don't know when they built that highway through there, but it's been there for... In the twenties, I guess.

DR. CRAWFORD: Twenties or thirties, Mr. Baker. Couldn't have been before the twenties.

MR. BAKER JR.: No, it was probably in the twenties that Highway 64 went in. It goes all the way up to Chattanooga.

MR. BAKER: They built that highway, run about through our farm.

MR. BAKER JR: Do you remember when they built it?



MR. BAKER: I don't remember when it was, now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, if I drive out Highway 64, I'd go through the farm there.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: I've been through there, then. I just didn't know where it was. Well, how often did you go in to Selmer? That was a big town for you, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Oh, yes. We'd go about once every week. Generally we'd go down to Selmer about every Saturday.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did a lot of people go to town on Saturdays?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Most all around would go to town on Saturday.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet the town was full of horses and mules and wagons and buggies.

MR. BAKER: Yes. They had a post put up out there on a little fence where you could hitch your horses. Ride a horse in and you can hitch him out there. Had a place to hitch them. Drive in your wagon if you wanted to.

DR. CRAWFORD: Ben [Schultze] wanted me to ask you, what about good-looking women? Did they have good-looking women that far back in Selmer?

MR. BAKER: Oh, yes. Good looking.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: [Laughter] You blamed it on me!

DR. CRAWFORD: Well it's a good question, anyway. And I'll bet they had some good-looking schoolteachers. A lot of the school teachers were women, weren't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Where I taught, one school, where they'd had



a woman teacher the year before me and the big boys had run her off. She quit before school was out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well Ben is right. Those are the things we ought to find out about. I think after you get already started in a school room, things are going to go all right. But you have to make it clear at the beginning, because if it gets out of control, it's hard to get back under control.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they had run off one teacher, but when they saw you, it was different?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I never had any trouble with them at all.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any idea how many years you taught school there?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember now how many years it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you work as a carpenter some, too, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: Yes, yes. I worked as a carpenter. Worked on the railroad for the railroad company a little while.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well how did you learn carpentry?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. I just learned how. Got a saw and a hammer and went to work.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was the railroad that went through there? Was that the Southern?

MR. BAKER: Southern, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you worked for that a while?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why did you decide to leave Selmer and go all the way to Memphis?



MR. BAKER: Well, I wanted to get a carpentry job. I came to Memphis, brought my carpenter's tools and went all around to where they were building houses around and tried to get a job. I couldn't find anybody that would talk to me about a job. And I had a brother that was working for Malone and Hyde department in the wholesale groceries and he recommended me to them and they started me in a grocery store.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was your brother's name?

MR. BAKER: Pat Baker.

DR. CRAWFORD: And he was already with Malone and Hyde?

MR. BAKER: Yes, he was with Malone and Hyde at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, where did you stay when you first came to Memphis?

MR. BAKER: Where did I stay? I just found a little place where they'd take in boarders.

DR. CRAWFORD: A boarding house somewhere?

MR. BAKER: Well, not a boarding house, just a private home where they'd take in a boarder.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember your first trip to Memphis?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: I would guess you came on the train, but I don't know. Did you ride the train back and forth sometimes?

MR. BAKER: Yes, yes. We had to come on the train.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you brought your carpenter's tools and looked for a job there.

MR. BAKER: Yes.



DR. CRAWFORD: Well you hadn't really planned to go into the grocery business, then, had you?

MR. BAKER: No, I hadn't really planned to go into the grocery business. But I got a job with a grocery store and went to work with them and I done all right in that and Malone and Hyde kind of put me into one store. They put me up... a little grocery store... somebody was going out of it, getting out. They put me and started me in that little grocery store and they sent me groceries in, put in my groceries, what I needed each week along and without charging me anything for them at all. I didn't have any money to pay them. And they didn't charge me anything for I don't remember how long -- two or three months. They put in what I would sell and didn't charge me for it. They charged me, of course, but I mean I didn't pay it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Not 'till later.

MR. BAKER: Not 'till later. And then later on, why they'd come back and told me that I was going to have to pay for them now, I'd gone as far as I could.

DR. CRAWFORD: But they let you get started.

MR. BAKER: Started the charging me then for them and then they'd add a little bit on for what I owed until they'd caught it up. Finally I got them all paid out to where I got all that I owed them paid off and I kept on the grocery business then 'till...

DR. CRAWFORD: ...'till two years ago?

MR. BAKER: My boys got big enough to come in and go to work with me.



DR. CRAWFORD: Now you had your first store at Nelson and Barksdale, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Barksdale and Nelson, yes, that's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did Malone and Hyde own the store at that time or did you own it?

MR. BAKER: No, Malone and Hyde owned it.

DR. CRAWFORD: They owned stores then.

MR. BAKER: They owned it. I don't know whether they owned the building or not. They owned the store, though and what was in it. It was rented; I paid rent on it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they own many stores then?

MR. BAKER: I don't know whether they owned the stores or not.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well they were not just in wholesale business, then. They were in retail business, too, weren't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes, they owned some of the retail stores. They owned them, too.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well before you started at that store, where did you get your first experience? Where was that store?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember, now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was it somewhere close there?

MR. BAKER JR: It was at Chelsea and Breedlove, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well the town was a lot smaller then, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: No.

MR. BAKER JR: That was more on the Memphis side. Chelsea and

Breedlove is... the Bowers store. That's where it was. I remember that store.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Bowers had a chain of stores, didn't he?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever meet him, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: No, I never did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I guess a lot of people who have worked in the Baker stores have not met the owners, either.

At least, all of you.

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you know Clarence Saunders when he was in the grocery business?

MR. BAKER: No, I didn't know him. I knew of him. I heard of him.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess you saw his stores around, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What ever happened to them?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, they were good for a while and then they changed or he lost them and then they became Piggly Wiggly or something like that, I think. But he tried again, didn't he?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think he had a chain called Kedoozle for a while and he had another one but I can't remember what it was called. And I think he went broke in all of them, or at least, he lost them. But you never lost your stores. You built



more, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes. My sons came in and took over. They expanded and got started other new stores.

DR. CRAWFORD: How would you pick a location for a new store?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. My sons, my oldest son was J.D. at that time, and he was working and he was the main one that started to get out and start a new store.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess you had to go where there were enough people.

MR. BAKER JR: He was looking for a growing neighborhood. Colonial Acres was just coming along then, you know. Nineteen forty-seven or 'forty-eight, they were just developing Colonial Acres then. Quince and Perkins.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you know, when the city grew so much then, after the war, all you had to do was just move out with it.

MR. BAKER JR: That's right. And that's the way it was going.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Baker, did you just retire two years ago?

MR. BAKER: I don't know just how long it's been, now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Sounds to me like you worked until you were ninety-six, then.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: You know doggone well you were at the store four hours a day. I'd come over to see you in the morning and you were down at the store. I went down to the store and you were working down there at White Station and Quince. I'd say, "What are you doing here?" You'd say, "I've got work to do today."



DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, I can believe it.

MR. BAKER JR: It's been about three years ago. He got to where he couldn't see to drive a car. He was driving that car.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Three years ago.

MR. BAKER JR: Yes, it was about three years ago.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: One of those boys brought him down there to the store.

MR. BAKER JR: That's right. For another year or so.

MR. BAKER: I worked the coupons for a long time there, sorting out all the coupons and counting them. I got to where I couldn't see. I couldn't tell a ten-cent one from a dollar one.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Well that's bad, isn't it? You've got to get someone else to do that.

MR. BAKER: Couldn't see the price on them.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Misplace the decimal point one point means a lot of money, don't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And the coupons were pretty big, then. You didn't worry about them when you started, did you?

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well do you remember when the trade stamps came in? Did you ever use them?

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Yes.

MR. BAKER: Well, some, I think. Not much.

MR. BAKER JR: Quality Stamps?



MR. BAKER: Quality Stamps.

MR. BAKER JR: In Big Star 31. One of the first stores to take them. Quince and Perkins. We started giving stamps. And that was right after World War II, pretty soon.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was earlier than I knew about. I didn't start seeing them until the fifties, I guess.

MR. BAKER JR: Well, this was along in...

MAJ. SCHULTZE: 'Forty-eight? 'Forty-nine?

MR. BAKER JR: Yes, somewhere along in there. I would imagine that's when they started the stamps.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: ...in Memphis they asked, "What do you do with them?" Trade them in.

MR. BAKER JR: Trading stamps.

DR. CRAWFORD: It took a while to learn what they were.

MR. BAKER: Yes. Trading stamps was the big thing in those days. You know, when they first came in, they were big.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: If you go around some of these Quality Stores that give away these prizes for stamps, it's still big.

MR. BAKER JR: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have much to do with sales, did the stamps or the Quality Stamps or the others really help business?

MR. BAKER JR: They did at that time. Sure did. Sure did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did anyone meet you at the station when you came, your brother or anyone?

MR. BAKER: No.



DR. CRAWFORD: You were just on your own. When did you get married? Was that a number of years later?

MR. BAKER: I can't remember. I just don't know.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: He came to Memphis when he was about thirty-four years old, when you moved to Memphis. And you had worked in Selmer a while then. Did you miss Selmer after you came to Memphis?

MR. BAKER: Did I what?

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you miss being in Selmer? Did you ever want to go back?

MR. BAKER: No, no I didn't. I liked Memphis all right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well it's sure been a good place for the stores. How many do you have altogether before you retired?

MR. BAKER: How many what?

DR. CRAWFORD: How many stores?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember. I just don't remember.

MR. BAKER JR: Five.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was sort of a family full of stores, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: My children run the stores. They have done all the expanding, getting new stores and all that. I didn't do it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well it's good to be able to pass it on to them, isn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see. When you came here in the 1920's,



they had a lot of street cars they used then,
didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes, they had street cars.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have a car when you came or did you get a
car later?

MR. BAKER: No, I didn't have a car, no. I got a car later.

I'd been in Memphis a good long while before I ever
had a car. Finally, I bought one. Back then, when you had a car,
it didn't have no started on it. You had to get out in front and
crank it to start it.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was hard work, wasn't it. Kind of dangerous
for your arm.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember the first car you ever had?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about those one-room schoolhouses you taught
in, Mr. Baker. Did anyone ever make any pictures?
Do you have any photographs of them?

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Maybe someone in McNairy County does. That would
be interesting. I hope they do.

MR. BAKER: No, I don't have any pictures of them. I don't
know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever meet any of your pupils later when
they'd grown up, people you'd taught?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't know that I have.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of course, you were in Memphis and they were mostly



in McNairy County, I guess.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well when you came, Mr. Crump was pretty important, E.H. Crump, in the city. Did you ever meet Mr. Crump?

MR. BAKER: No, I never did meet him.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were pretty much involved in taking care of business, weren't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was Malone and Hyde your supplier all the way through?

MR. BAKER: Yes. They've been all the way.

DR. CRAWFORD: You've had good business relations with them, then.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who owned the company then? Was it two people?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. Mr. Hyde is the only one I ever knew.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that the father of the one who is there now?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Pitt Hyde, I believe, is the one who is in charge of it now. And did you think you would like the grocery business better than you did farming?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't know. I liked farming all right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I did too, Mr. Baker. It's hard work though, isn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes, it's hard work. You get up early in the



morning before the sun would get up.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because time was really important. You had to start work early when it got light, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes, that's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess you would get up when it was dark, sometimes, wouldn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they'd have breakfast and then you'd get out and work.

MR. BAKER: Yes. Come up a rain on the fields, I'd get wet before I'd get to the house.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because you'd work right up until the time to leave, wouldn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because when it was raining, it was too wet to plow, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes. When it just started to rain, maybe it would be too wet if you'd be out plowing. It would be dry along and you'd need the rain. One come up, you'd be out there plowing and it would come up. Quit and go to the house, then. You'd have to put on dry clothes, sometimes. I'd get wet before I got home.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, when I used to work on the farm, Mr. Baker, I was always glad to see a rain come up, because that meant you got to stop for the day.

MR. BAKER: Yes, that's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: If it was enough rain, anyway.



MR. BAKER: Yes, that's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: You'd get to unharness the horses and get out of the field.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And some of that work was pretty cold, wasn't it? picking corn and taking it to the corn crib. You did that in the fall didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Did what?

DR. CRAWFORD: The corn-gathering, that was done in cold weather, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes, that was in the fall. Yes, we went down the line, pulling off all the ears off the land, gather it all up, load it all up and haul it off to the crib.

DR. CRAWFORD: And then you would shuck it and shell it when you needed meal.

MR. BAKER: That's right. Needed the meal, I'd go out and shuck it and shell it and get a bushel or two bushels of corn, put it in a sack and throw it across the horse's back and get on it and ride to the mill. We had a mill on a creek bank where it would turn the water through and the water would run the mill.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know what the creek was called? What was the name of that creek?

MR. BAKER: Creek? Turkey Creek. Crooked Creek.

DR. CRAWFORD: Crooked Creek.

MR. BAKER: Crooked Creek ran through our farm. And the other one was Turkey Creek, the one that had the mill on



it, I believe.

DR. CRAWFORD: I will look for them the next time I go to Selmer, Mr. Baker. Because I ought to see them on Highway 64.

MR. BAKER: Crooked Creek. I don't know whether the creek still runs there now or not. All through the summertime, in dry weather, it would dry up. The creek wouldn't run, but there would be holes of water in it all along, where there were holes. But it would dry up and quit running through the summer time, that creek would. Maybe it quit altogether now. I don't know whether there is still a creek there or not.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, some have gone dry. I don't know, but I'll look for it over there.

MR. BAKER: Crooked Creek ran right through our farm. And they've got a highway going through it now. They didn't have that highway when I was back there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Not when you left?

MR. BAKER: No, not when I left.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, that is U.S. 64 on the east side of Selmer. Did you go to church there at Selmer or in the county?

MR. BAKER: Went out in the county. Bethesda was the church name where I went to church, out there in the county.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who was the preacher? Do you remember?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember, now. We had different preachers, along from time to time.



DR. CRAWFORD: You had Sunday School, I guess?

MR. BAKER: Yes, we had Sunday School there every Sunday.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have church meetings in the summer? Did they have a meeting after the crops were laid by?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. Had preaching along. About once a month we'd have a preacher come out there and preach.

DR. CRAWFORD: Didn't have one every Sunday?

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't have a preacher every Sunday. About once a month we'd have a preacher. Then sometimes in the summertime we'd have a big meeting, they called it. Would have a preacher come and preach there every day and at night there for a week. A week. Like a meeting.

DR. CRAWFORD: During the day and the night, too.

MR. BAKER: Yes, during the day and then preach at night.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet you had pretty good crowds of people come to that.

MR. BAKER: Yes. Lots of people. Lots of them get converted and have religion, get up there and shout.

DR. CRAWFORD: What kind of church was it, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: Bethesda was the name of the church where I went there.

DR. CRAWFORD: I mean was it Baptist or Methodist or Presbyterian?

MR. BAKER: It was Presbyterian.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any idea about how many people usually went to church there?



MR. BAKER: No, I don't know. All the people around in the neighborhood there came to church there.

DR. CRAWFORD: People mostly did not have cars then, did they?

MR. BAKER: No, they didn't have cars back then. I remember the first car that I ever saw. The first car that come to Selmer, Tennessee. Somebody announced that somebody was going to have a car there. Everybody was out on the street waiting. There were crowds all up and down the street waiting to see him drive.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I can understand that. It would be quite a treat.

MR. BAKER: Yes. He got out there in the street and started that car and come down the street with it. It didn't have a top over it. It wasn't all closed in. But he drove all down the street there, and everybody looked. "That car runs with no horses to it." Run without horses.

DR. CRAWFORD: [Laughter] It sure did seem unusual, didn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: No horses. They were all under the hood.

MR. BAKER: And those, the first cars, to start them they had to get out in front and turn the crank to start them.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they had pretty poor roads then.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you like to ride on the train?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I liked to ride.

DR. CRAWFORD: After you came to Memphis, did you go home much to



see the folks?

MR. BAKER: No, I didn't go home much. Just once in a while.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was on the train, I guess?

MR. BAKER: Yes. You'd go on the train to go. Well I finally, after a long time, I got a car. Bought a car. And I could drive home in a car. Drive back to Selmer. But I brought my family all back to Memphis. Got them all moved in. My wife and children and all come on in.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did they live first?

MR. BAKER: I've forgot. I just don't know now. I don't know where it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: What's your father and your mother's name, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: My father's name was Daniel Baker and my mother's name was Mary.

DR. CRAWFORD: Had they always lived at Selmer or did they come from somewhere else?

MR. BAKER: My father came from North Carolina. He came there. He married though after he came to Selmer, after he came to McNairy County. Out about three miles from Selmer, two and a half or three miles out from Selmer, where we had a home out from there. My mother lived over on Oxford Creek there before she married him.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of all the work you did, Mr. Baker, how did you like cotton-picking?

MR. BAKER: I never did pick much cotton. The women in our family done most all the picking of the cotton. I



did pick some, I picked a little cotton, but not much.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of course, that was the way it had to be done.
they didn't have cotton-picking machines then.

MR. BAKER: No, they didn't have cotton-picking machines.

DR. CRAWFORD: As a matter of fact, a lot of things they didn't
have.

MR. BAKER: You'd have to go down, get a sack, put a strap
around your shoulder, go up and down the packs
there, pulling them out of the bowls on the row. Picking all the
cotton.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was hard work, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Hard work, yes. And I didn't do much of that.
I've done some, picked a little cotton. But not
much of that. Generally, the women in our family done most of the
cotton picking. The men would be doing some other kind of work.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I'm sure there was plenty of work to go
around.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you cut your own wood? Did you have a
fireplace or a stove?

MR. BAKER: We had a fireplace.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you cut wood for it?

MR. BAKER: Yes. I cut wood and hauled it to town and sold it.
Cut lots of firewood.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you use a saw?

MR. BAKER: Yes, used a saw.

DR. CRAWFORD: A cross-cut saw, I guess, wasn't it?



MR. BAKER: Cross-saw, yes. You hold one on one end of it and the other one somebody on the other end and pulled it across there and saw down through a log across the wood. It took two people to run the saw, but you could use a hand saw for one to run. We had two people for a cross-cut saw, we called it.

DR. CRAWFORD: And then you had to get a wagon and haul that wood out, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: All that wood in, haul it to town and sold it. I sold it by the cord, lots of times. Hauled it in and sold cut wood or made cross-ties and hauled them in and sold them to the railroad company.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was a big market, then, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because the railroads were very important.

MR. BAKER: I don't know. Do railroads still have cross-ties under them? Run like they did them days?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir. Some of them do, anyway. I think I have read some of them may have found a way to use concrete ties but I believe all I have seen have still been wood. So they have to be buying them somewhere.

MR. BAKER: Well I made lots of them and hauled them in.

[End of side one]

I'd make a pile of them twenty feet long sometimes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they want any certain kind of tree, pine or anything else?

MR. BAKER: No, any kind of wood. They took any kind of wood.



And we'd just hew it off on each side, square it up and make a square pile out of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did they use those piles for?

MR. BAKER: They used them where they made the bridges across places, I think. Where they had to have a pile or something go down to the ground up on it to hold up and go across.

DR. CRAWFORD: The bridges were wood, then.

MR. BAKER: Yes. The railroad company would have to run across a place sometimes, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. So they bought a lot of cross-ties.

MR. BAKER: Yes. Piling and cross-ties.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now how did you hew them? What kind of tool did you use?

MR. BAKER: We had a broad-axe, we called it. Lined them up there, like a line across there. Chop the end to it and then hew it off.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems like everything you did was a lot of work.

MR. BAKER: It was work. It was a lot of work.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were used to hard work by the time you came to Memphis.

MR. BAKER: Oh, yes. I sawed wood. We'd cut a cord of wood and would haul it to town and sell it for firewood.

A lot of people had fireplaces in those day. I don't reckon they use so much now. Maybe they have electric heat now, mostly.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, a lot of it.



MR. BAKER: They had fireplaces back then. Used firewood on them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well how much different was life in Memphis, when you got here, from on the farm?

MR. BAKER: How much different?

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you notice most about it, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. Oh, about the same, I reckon.

DR. CRAWFORD: You didn't make nearly as many things, though. Didn't cut your own wood and didn't butcher your own meat.

MR. BAKER: No, no. Nothing like that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Had to buy a lot.

MR. BAKER: Had to buy all that in Memphis. Didn't do no kind of work then. I got in the grocery business and all I did was sell groceries. Buy groceries and sell them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you were lucky that people started buying more groceries than they did when you were a boy.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Or you couldn't have sold very much.

MR. BAKER: Well we didn't have as many like they do now, and they were cheap, too. Lots of stuff we'd sell for a nickel and a dime. Sometimes they'd come in and buy two or three cents worth of something.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was more money than it is now.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well how had Memphis changed most while you have been in the city?

MR. BAKER: Oh, I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of course, it's a lot bigger, for one thing.

MR. BAKER: Yes, it's a lot bigger. Cars are running everywhere now and everything is done with electricity. There are no horses and wagons. You never do see a horse and wagon any more.

DR. CRAWFORD: No, you don't, in the town, do you. I don't know when, maybe never, I've seen one in Memphis.

MR. BAKER: When I first come to Memphis, they had horses and wagons all around. We had a horse and kept a horse in the stall by the store, and a wagon there, and delivered groceries with it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Delivered them by wagon, huh?

MR. BAKER: Delivered them by wagon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I think in the 1930's and maybe before, some people put automobile wheels and tires on wagons, didn't they.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you have had an interesting life in Memphis, Mr. Baker. You have seen a lot of the city.

MR. BAKER: Yes.





THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE PROJECT IS "RECOLLECTIONS OF THE MID-SOUTH." THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. HENRY D. BAKER. ALSO PRESENT ARE HENRY BAKER'S SON, BEN BAKER, AND MAJ. BEN R. SCHULTZE. THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 16, 1987. THE PLACE IS THE BAKER RESIDENCE IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEWER IS DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY J. DOUGLAS SIMS. INTERVIEW II.

DR. CRAWFORD: This interview is a Mr. Henry D. Baker at Memphis Tennessee, February 17, 1987 by Dr. Charles Crawford from the Oral History Research Office at Memphis State University. The recording is by cassette. Mr. Baker, what I'd like to do is just talk with you a little today about some of your recollections about what things were like quite a long time ago, and I'd especially like to talk to you about what Memphis was like. You saw it when it was a lot different from what it is now. You came here in the early twenties, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes. There wasn't many automobiles running around like they do now. They had horses and wagons on the street.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you see most of, Mr. Baker, horses and wagons or...

MR. BAKER: Yes, horses and wagons. I was in the grocery business and had a stable back of the store and kept a horse in it and a wagon that delivered groceries. A horse and wagon.



DR. CRAWFORD: Did many of the stores deliver that way?

MR. BAKER: Yes, several of them did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were several of them using trucks by then?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I guess they were. Maybe probably some of them were.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, you had telephones, I guess, didn't you, your customers did.

MR. BAKER: Yes, we had telephones.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they telephone in their orders? Did they call them in to you?

MR. BAKER: Yes, a lot of them would call in their orders and we'd write down what they wanted and go and carry it to them, deliver it to them.

DR. CRAWFORD: So they would call in their order by telephone and you would have it delivered by horse and wagon.

Well now how far could you deliver? Did you have your customers mostly around close?

MR. BAKER: Well, mostly around in the neighborhood close. We had... My little boys got in the grocery store, got to carrying out groceries for me when they were little. One of my little boys was carrying out groceries and going down the street with the groceries in a little wagon he was pulling. He got way down on the street and some man walked up and just picked them up, the sacks of groceries out of his wagon and walked off with them. And he couldn't do a thing about it. Come back and reported it, and the police tried to find out who it was, but they couldn't. There was no way for them to know who it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you know, there are not many thefts like that now, from little red wagons. They're mostly different.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that the first time you were robbed?

MR. BAKER: Yes, as far as I know it was. I don't remember anything else.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I'm glad it wasn't any worse than that, because I know some of them now get a lot more than that.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did most of your customers come by car or did they walk over to your store?

MR. BAKER: They walked over, most of them did. Most of them lived close around in the neighborhood and they just walked to the store. There wasn't so many cars then like there is now. There was a lot of horses and wagons and things on the streets. And they don't ever see them, now. Nothing but automobiles.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well where did they keep their horses?

MR. BAKER: Well they'd have a stall by home somewhere that they'd keep their horses in. I had a stall right there by the store where I kept my horse to deliver groceries with.

DR. CRAWFORD: You know the city finally passed a law against that, against keeping horses in town. Do you know when they did?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't remember when it was done, but it's sure different after that. Because Memphis used to be just full of horses.

MR. BAKER: Well you never see one now, on the streets.

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't think I have in years now. That was when your store was on Barksdale, was it?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Well, it was before I got in business, in the little stores that I operated for somebody else for a little while before I got started in one myself. But that was my first one, there on Barksdale is where I started in business.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were most of the streets around there paved then?

MR. BAKER: Well, I don't know. I don't remember. Yes, I reckon they were paved.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now how far were you from Lennox?

MR. BAKER: From what?

DR. CRAWFORD: Lennox. That was a neighborhood. Was that on the east side of Cooper?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember what that was.

DR. CRAWFORD: I remember that as being a separate town at one time and it joined Memphis I think in 1910, they took it in.

MR. BAKER: I don't remember about that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you do any of your delivery by bicycle? Did you have any boys delivering that way?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't believe we did. I don't remember if we



did. [Brief gap in tape] ...business.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had charge accounts then?

MR. BAKER: So we had charge accounts with the customers. And a lot of them would buy groceries for a week or a month. Some of them would pay once a month. Some of them would pay every week and some of them would pay once a month. Depends upon how they got paid, I reckon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they ever get behind on payments, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: Well, once in a while some of them would get kind of behind, but I don't think I ever lost anything to amount to anything on it, on charge accounts. I collected practically all of it. Maybe there was a few once or twice that I had to give to an agent outside to collect.

DR. CRAWFORD: But they wanted a percentage, I guess, didn't they, if they did?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when you changed over from charge to cash?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember. It was just charge right there in that one store at Barksdale and Ellison. Never did anywhere else. And we got another store started that was all cash. We never did have a charge account anywhere else.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you had steady customers there, didn't you, and you knew them.

MR. BAKER: Yes, they lived right there in the neighborhood. Lived right there and we knew them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that's a big help, to be able to buy their



groceries on a charge account. Who handled the books about all that? Who kept up with the payments?

MR. BAKER: Well, we just had the... I don't know. We just kept a book where we wrote down what they got and kept it on one book there and when they paid, we'd mark it off. I don't remember too much about it now. I forget.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now how old were your boys when they started working in the stores?

MR. BAKER: Well they started delivering groceries along with me at first, until they got old enough to go in and do the clerking, do the selling and so on. But first they just delivered groceries.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you hope they would go into the grocery business?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I hoped they would. Some of them was off doing something else for a little while and then came back to the grocery.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well what was the second store you opened?

MR. BAKER: I can't remember which one was second. I don't know now.

DR. CRAWFORD: You started on Barksdale...

MR. BAKER: Yes, we started on Barksdale.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now what about the one on White Station? Did that come a lot later?

MR. BAKER: White Station. Which is that now?

BEN BAKER: Quince and Perkins.

MR. BAKER: Quince and Perkins?



DR. CRAWFORD: Quince and Perkins, yes.

MR. BAKER: Quince and Perkins. I guess that was about the first we started. My son, J.D., was the oldest boy. When he got out of service he come back in right in the store and wanted to go to work in the store and took over and he done this getting out and starting the new stores. He was the main one. I never did get out and select another place to go in. J. D. was the one that did that, starting. And then he wrote the other boys who were off doing something else and he wrote to them to come back and help in the grocery business and they all came back along. And then they all got started in the grocery business, all of them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was he in World War II? Did he fight in the World War?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't think any of them fought in the war.

DR. CRAWFORD: But he was in service, wasn't he.

MR. BAKER: He was in service for a little while.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well when you started out, did you have any idea you'd develop several stores?

MR. BAKER: No, I didn't think about it. I never thought about what I would do. And if it hadn't been for my boys, I wouldn't have, I guess. I never would have started another one. That would have been the only one I had. But J.D., my oldest son, was the main one that started to getting the other stores. Went out and started the store at... Thirty one, Big Star Thirty-One first, and then Big Star Sixty-four, all of them. He was the main one that got the new locations, selected them, and



started the other stores.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he go out and manage the new stores?

MR. BAKER: Yes, he went out...

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you still buying from Malone and Hyde then?

MR. BAKER: Yes, we bought from Malone and Hyde all the time.
They furnished all our groceries.

BEN BAKER: When J.D. started another store, one of the other
sons went into that store.

MR. BAKER: Yes, they'd go in with him.

BEN BAKER: And then when he passed away, he was managing the
store at Quince and Perkins, was he not?

MR. BAKER: I think so.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Dr. Crawford asked you about the charge accounts.

As late as two years ago or before Ben sold the
store, the original store at Nelson and Barksdale, he was still
charging, he was still putting customers on the cuff, so to
speak.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well how did the depression affect your business
in the nineteen thirties? Did times get worse for
people in the grocery business?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess some of your customers had more trouble
paying for their groceries.

MR. BAKER: I don't remember if we had charge accounts now in
any of the other stores. I think they were all
just cash, I believe.

DR. CRAWFORD: Like they are now.



MR. BAKER: Like they are now. The first store I started, I had charge accounts. Most all my customers were charge accounts there. They'd come in and pay every week and I never did have much trouble collecting.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well they were neighbors there. You knew them.

MR. BAKER: Just neighbors there. Lived right there. Lived right around the store.

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't guess you could do that in a supermarket, could you, because your customers come from all over, don't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes. All my customers lived there right around the store, close around.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did they start the name Big Star? Do you know that, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'd wondered how that got started. But you just gave them numbers, didn't you? Like Big Star 31 and Big Star 64?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had your own management right there in the family with all the boys.

MR. BAKER: Yes, they ran it. They took over the stores and done the managing in all the stores.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they learn it there or did they have to take any bookkeeping courses or anything?

MR. BAKER: No, they didn't take any bookkeeping courses or anything. They just learned how to do it there,



just... It was all cash, we did cash business always. When we would get into a new store, open a new store, why they would come in and take over and run it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who was the biggest competition at this time?

Were the Kroger stores important?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: How about Liberty Cash? Back in those days, that's what they got the name from. They sold for cash. And Mr. Bauers and Clarence Saunders all sold for cash at the same time you were running your store on a credit proposition.

MR. BAKER: Yes, only we didn't run them on credit, only there that first store we had charge accounts.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Right, but that first store was about fifteen or eighteen years before you got your other ones, wasn't it? My folks traded at a store that had a charge account and we paid the bill every two weeks. We'd go down there and pay the bill every two weeks. So you'd phone your groceries in. Ben, your next-to-eldest son told me that that's what happened in your stores, people would phone orders in and you would select, or one of your clerks would select the food for them and they had to be satisfied with it or they could send it back, but now in your big supermarkets today, you select your own and if it's not right, sometimes you can't take it back.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did customers ever return anything?

MR. BAKER: Well, I don't remember. I guess they did sometimes



maybe bring something back, if they got something they didn't want.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well what was your biggest expense of operating except for the stock itself?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. Delivery business, maybe. We delivered most all the groceries. They just phoned the order in and we had to get the order up and then deliver it to them and collect for it. A few of them would be charge. We had a few charge accounts, of course. We had a good many charge accounts back there at that first store, Barksdale. We had a good many charge accounts. They would just phone the order in and we would deliver it to them and have them charge it, sign for it, when they got it. And when they came in they would pay for it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you handle the stock yourself? Get it down off the shelves and everything?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever keep space in your store for people to sit around and visit?

MR. BAKER: No, not that I know of, no.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yours was not like the old country stores.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well how would you plan the new ones when you opened them? Did you get someone to help you, an architect or someone?

MR. BAKER: No. We just opened a new store. Rented the building and ordered the groceries out from Malone and Hyde. We got all of our groceries from Malone and Hyde at



that time. And Malone and Hyde would stock it up.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were a good customer of Malone and Hyde, weren't you, for a long time?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I guess we were.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now what about the delivery expense. Did you add a cost to the groceries when it was delivered to their houses?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I believe we had a little delivery charge on them. I've forgotten now just what it was. I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that was sure a convenience for a woman to be able to do her shopping from home by the telephone and not have to go out. It would not surprise me if they would begin to do that some in the future. Things may sort of go back where they were. The delivery business is getting larger now.

MR. BAKER: I don't reckon there are any stores here now that you could phone an order into and get it delivered. I don't reckon there is. I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't think so, Mr. Baker. Not that I know of.

MR. BAKER: That's the way lots of ours was done at that time. Just call up and the grocery... the phone would ring and they would give you an order and order so-and-so. We'd get it up and carry it to them and collect for it. Some of them had charge accounts and they would charge it. That first store, we had charge accounts. The other stores we opened as all cash always.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Baker, what kinds of things did you sell then



that you sell in the stores now. I know the market must have changed.

MR. BAKER: Well, yes, we sold coal oil and vinegar in the barrel. We had a barrel of vinegar and we would draw out a bottle of vinegar for them and coal oil and a big can of coal oil there where we'd draw out and sell coal oil to take home.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you did that, would the people bring their own jug to put it in?

MR. BAKER: Bring their can, their jug to put it in, yes. And we sold molasses out of a barrel, had a barrel of molasses. We'd draw out molasses. Some of them, a dime or a quarter's worth of molasses, something or other. And bottles, sell it to them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well they knew it was fresh then. They could see you get it out.

MR. BAKER: Yes. They'd bring their something in to get it. When they wanted coal oil they'd bring their can in, their coal oil can in and get it filled up. When they wanted molasses they'd bring their something in to put them in to draw out the molasses for them.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you didn't worry about containers. They brought their own.

MR. BAKER: Brought their own.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now you didn't handle frozen food then, did you?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't believe we had frozen food.



DR. CRAWFORD: What about your meat. Did you get that from Malone and Hyde too?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Most of it, I think came from Malone and Hyde.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have a refrigerator to keep it in, then?

MR. BAKER: Yes, we had a refrigerator.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now what kind of soft drinks did you sell then? I'm sure Coca Cola must have been around then.

MR. BAKER: Oh yes. Coca Cola is the main one. Coca Cola and I've forgotten. Lemon drinks or something. I've forgotten now just what they were. I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you sell any of the other things, Pepsi Cola, or did they come in later?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember Pepsi Cola at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think they came in later than Coca Cola did. Did you sell any dry goods?

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't sell any dry goods.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was just a grocery store.

MR. BAKER: Just groceries.

DR. CRAWFORD: And by the time you retired, how many stores did you have?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember. About five, I think.

DR. CRAWFORD: And I guess you didn't have any idea that business would grow that large, did you?

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't think about that.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were lucky to have your boys in the business.

MR. BAKER: My boys were the main ones that did it. J.D., my



oldest son, he was the main one that would get a new location, get a new store started. Through Malone and Hyde, mostly. Malone and Hyde helped us.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that helped, having Malone and Hyde as friends, didn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you opened a new store, what did Malone and Hyde do to help you?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember now. They'd furnish us the groceries, stock, to put in it. I think they sent somebody around to help stock it up. To help get it started.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you knew your stock was good then, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who was Malone and Hyde's biggest competitor? Was there another wholesaler in town then?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember if there was. I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because you didn't deal with them.

MR. BAKER: No. Didn't deal with anybody else.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were with Malone and Hyde all the way through, weren't you?

MR. BAKER: All the way through. Yes. Mr. Hyde was a good friend of mine.

DR. CRAWFORD: He's been gone a number of years, hasn't he?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was he like?

MR. BAKER: Oh, he was a good man, a good man. A good friend.

DR. CRAWFORD: And he was interested in the grocery business, too, of course.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did they have there business then? Was it downtown?

MR. BAKER: Yes, it was here in town. I don't remember just where it was located, now. I forget.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I believe their offices are over on Poplar now, aren't they?

MR. BAKER: To tell you the truth, I don't know where they are now.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think they are in the old building... let's see. It would be, I guess, between Tillman and that little shopping center, kind of a small mall in there. I think they have the old building that Jefferson Ward had one time.

MR. BAKER: I just don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: But they may keep part of their warehouses in Mississippi now. Was there any peak time for the shopping? Did people come more late in the day or just all day?

MR. BAKER: It was just all day. Just any time of day. We just opened the stores before eight o'clock every day. Get there about seven thirty or eight o'clock. Seven o'clock, a lot of times, we were open at seven o'clock. Stayed open 'till five or six, in those early days.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have other suppliers for your bread or dairy products or anything? Or did you get them from Malone and Hyde?



MR. BAKER: Well, I think they came from Malone and Hyde at that time, in those early days. I don't know how it is now. All the bakeries, different bakeries deliver now all around in different stores.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well did you ever put in a bakery in any of your newer stores?

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now you delivered by horse and wagon at first, Mr. Baker.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when you got your first car?

MR. BAKER: Well at first we had just some little boys with a wagon. Just a little wagon carried the groceries out. I remember my oldest son was delivering for us with the groceries and he had a little wagon carrying them out and he carried out a little wagon with big sack of groceries in it one day and he went down the street and he got a way down the street and some man just walked up and picked them up out of his wagon and walked off with them. He couldn't do anything about it. He came back and reported it and we called the police and they couldn't... no way they could find out who it was then. The boy didn't know him, you know, didn't know who he was. I remember that. He just picked them up and walked off with them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was there much burglary or robbery of stores then?

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't have any robberies in the stores that I know of.

DR. CRAWFORD: I didn't think there would be much then, because



that was back in Mr. Crump's time, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever meet him, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: Mr...

DR. CRAWFORD: Crump?

MR. BAKER: Mr. Crump? I don't know whether I did. I don't believe I ever met him.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you had a business to run. You couldn't get away very much, I guess.

MR. BAKER: No, I didn't get out to meet anybody. I was right there in the store all the time, at work.

DR. CRAWFORD: If you opened between seven and eight, what time did you close?

MR. BAKER: I forget now just what time it was. We closed, I don't know, about seven, I guess. Six or seven then we would close.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was so people could come in after work, was it?

MR. BAKER: Yes. We stayed long enough so they could come in after work.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who did most of the shopping then, men or women?

MR. BAKER: Well, I guess it was more women than men. Women would come in and buy their groceries. Just ones that lived right close around. We didn't deliver groceries very far. A lot of them that we delivered, the first time they just called up and ordered their groceries. We delivered them to them. Had a little boy to carry them out in a wagon. And then later



when we had a horse and wagon and had a stall there right by the side of the store where we kept the horse all the time and we delivered with a horse and wagon. We delivered barrels of flour sometimes and things like that, with that horse and wagon.

DR. CRAWFORD: People would buy a lot then, wouldn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes, they'd buy flour by the barrel.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that a wooden barrel?

MR. BAKER: A wooden barrel. A wooden barrel of flour.

DR. CRAWFORD: I didn't know that.

MR. BAKER: Yes, we sold it that way. Delivered it that way.

That's the way... Oh, no. I remember at home we always had in our kitchen, had a little room there beside the kitchen and we had a big barrel of flour and a big barrel that was to put meal in. We carried the shelled corn and carried it to the mill and had it ground into meal and put in that barrel. And the other, we had a barrel of flour and had it sitting there until it was all used up.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did people buy more flower or meal in Memphis?

MR. BAKER: I guess they bought more meal, probably, than they did flour.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems like a lot of people ate cornbread then, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: You didn't get a lot of time off. You worked about twelve hours a day, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes, yes. I worked all the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you close early any days?



MR. BAKER: No, we stayed open pretty well late. Stayed open 'till nine o'clock most of the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you were closed on Sundays, I guess.

MR. BAKER: Yes, we closed every Sunday.

DR. CRAWFORD: You got one day off, then.

MR. BAKER: Yes, we had one day off. Didn't open on Sunday.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you and the boys do on your days off?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember now. Well, we went to church on Sunday.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where were you going to church then?

MR. BAKER: We had a church right there close to the Barksdale store, a little church there. We went to church there.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you did not have to travel far.

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't have to travel far. I lived right close to the store there on Nelson.

DR. CRAWFORD: About how far from the store did you live?

MR. BAKER: Oh, it wasn't far. Just about a block.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that was easy to walk. You did not need a car, did you?

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't need a car to go to the store at all. I didn't have a car at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when you got your first one?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember now when I got the first car. I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you had to have a lot of room in it because you had a lot of boys.



MR. BAKER: Yes. [Laughter]

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have any streetcars that came close to the store?

MR. BAKER: Streetcars? No, there were no streetcars that went right close.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, you were south of Peabody and Union and Poplar, the big east-west streets.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

MR. BAKER: I worked as a carpenter. I did carpentry work.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now that was harder work, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: That was hard work. I worked as a carpenter for the railroad company. I worked with a crew of us. I've forgotten now just how many of us were in that crew. We had three or four cars we'd park on the railroad and we stayed in those cars. We slept in those cars and had a cook in one of them to eat, in one of those cars. And we done work on the railroad. Painted the depots and done any repair work along the railroad that had to be done.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you work on the bridges any?

MR. BAKER: Water towers and bridges. Anything that had to be done along the railroad, we worked on that as carpenters. That was before I ever came to Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you travel a lot when you did that job?

MR. BAKER: Travel? No, just up and down. Just the railroad. Through the neighborhood.

DR. CRAWFORD: You did not get too far away from Selmer, then, when you did that?



MR. BAKER: No, not too far.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why did they have to have so many water towers then?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. They had to have a water tower, all of the trains had to get water when they'd come by.

DR. CRAWFORD: For the steam engine, didn't they? For the boiler in the steam engine.

MR. BAKER: Yes. I don't know whether they use water in them now or not.

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't think a diesel does. I never see any water towers now. But they used to have it and have to have it up high, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: They would pump it up there and they would swing an arm out to put it down in the locomotive, wouldn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess you've watched them do that.

MR. BAKER: I painted those towers. I painted them, a lot of times. Get up on the scaffold all around there and swing around and paint those water towers all around. I did that for a while.

DR. CRAWFORD: What were they made out of at that time? Were they wood or steel?

MR. BAKER: They were wood.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now when the boys were growing up, where did they



go to school?

MR. BAKER: Well they went here at I forget just where we lived. There was a school near by where we lived.

I've forgotten just what school it was. I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what street it was on, sir?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess they walked to school, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: It couldn't have been very far then, could it?

MR. BAKER: No, it wasn't far.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now when World War II came along, there was rationing. Do you remember that?

MR. BAKER: Rationing. Oh, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: People had to use coupons, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes. They did that. They had to have coupons to buy there groceries then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well what happened to you during this period? Was it hard to do the paperwork for coupons and rationing?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember that it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did that work? Did they let people have only a certain ammount of food?

MR. BAKER: Yes, there were certain things they had to sell for those food coupons, I think. Some things you couldn't sell on a food coupon. You could only buy food, something to eat there with them. I've forgotten. It's been so long ago on them I don't remember.



DR. CRAWFORD: That's been forty-some years ago.

MR. BAKER: It's been so long ago I just don't remember how it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'm not sure I would know a rationing coupon now if I saw one.

MR. BAKER: Oh, I'm sure I wouldn't.

DR. CRAWFORD: But you couldn't sell it if they didn't them, could you?

MR. BAKER: Not if they didn't have the coupon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were any commodities hard to get in the war?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't know. I don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: They were just rationed so people didn't use too much?

MR. BAKER: Yes. I've forgotten. I just don't remember how all those things were in those days now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you remember a lot, Mr. Baker. You remember a lot of it. You know, a lot of businesses went broke in the depression, but you kept right on going, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you do that? I know some of your customers must have lost their jobs and not had money.

MR. BAKER: Well, on our first store there at Barksdale and Ellison, we had charge accounts with customers.

Customers that lived there in the neighborhood had charge accounts they'd pay off every week or some of them just once a month if they got paid by the month. And we always collected pretty well. We didn't have much trouble about collecting from them. None of



the other stores that were open, it was just cash always.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I think the other was just sort of going out of date, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: The charge stores. I've shopped in charge stores, but not for a long time, but I guess only small stores do that now.

MR. BAKER: It may be. I don't know. But our first store, we did, we had charge accounts with our customers that lived right there in the neighborhood. And I never had much trouble about collecting. I don't remember us ever losing any of it. I thing we collected pretty well always.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now I can tell you one other thing you did not have to do then. You did not have to collect sales tax.

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't have no sales tax then.

DR. CRAWFORD: What taxes did you collect? Did you get any?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember us collecting any taxes now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have to buy any permits or inspection tags or anything that cost you?

MR. BAKER: I just don't remember if we did. I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Tennessee did not get a sales tax until I believe 1948. And you had been in business well over twenty years, I believe, by then.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: That came kind of late. Did you work in the new stores after they opened?



MR. BAKER: No, I didn't work in any of the new stores after they opened. Well, I was keeping the records, books and so on. I would keep the records of the new stores, but I didn't wait on customers in any of the new stores that opened. But I believe I did at Barksdale and Ellison, I did kind of manage that store for a little while. Go by and open up and wait on the customers for a little while. Mostly it was my boys that done all that kind of work for me. I stayed in the office after they got started.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I tell you, with that many boys, you had a lot of help. Now do you have seven boys?

MR. BAKER: Five boys.

DR. CRAWFORD: Five boys. Now you have one who died young and then how many others?

MR. BAKER: Charles. Charles was the one who died first and J.D. and Ben and Alvin and Lee and John.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they all liked to work in grocery stores.

MR. BAKER: Yes, they all got in the grocery business.

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't guess any have ever been a railroad carpenter like you have, have they?

MR. BAKER: No. No, some of them kind of got in service with the Army there for a little while. Alvin got back.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well the Army was calling a lot of people then.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: I know you were glad when they came back and the war was over.



MR. BAKER: Oh yes. Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you opened your new stores, did you lease a building or did you have one built?

MR. BAKER: Oh, we leased a building.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THE PROJECT IS "RECOLLECTIONS OF THE MID-SOUTH." THE DATE IS MAY 12, 1987. THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. HENRY D. BAKER. ALSO PRESENT IS MAJ. BEN SCHULTZE AND MR. BEN BAKER, MR. HENRY BAKER'S SON. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY J. DOUGLAS SIMS. INTERVIEW III.

DR. CRAWFORD Mr. Baker, I wanted to ask you a little bit about what you remembered about times back when you moved to Memphis. You moved kind of gradually, didn't you? You came over and then you'd go back home a lot and then finally you began to move everything over here and then you went back less and less.

MR. BAKER: Yes. When I first came to Memphis I come in looking for a job as a carpenter. I brought my carpenter's tools and went around to several places where they were building houses and I couldn't find anybody that would talk to me about a job and I finally got a job with a little grocery store.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever do any carpentry work after that?

MR. BAKER: No, not after that. I used to do a little carpentry work when I was back home. I worked for the railroad company for a little while as a carpenter. We went in the box cars and went from one place to another and [we would] park the [box] car and get out and work there on the depots



and things, paint them and work there, doing any repair work they had to do, and sleep in the boxcar all night. We had to cook there and eat in the boxcars. We had our meals there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Those were kind of bunk cars there, weren't they? They had bunks in them. Did they have fans or heaters?

MR. BAKER: Well yes, they had heaters. I don't remember about fans.

DR. CRAWFORD: I seems to me like that would be kind of uncomfortable, because you were always parked on the siding, weren't you? And there wasn't any shade around.

MR. BAKER: It was comfortable. It was all right. I enjoyed it. We just slept in that boxcar there at night, we had a bed there, on it. We had about three or four boxcars along. I don't remember how many now. We had one that we cooked and ate in and one that we slept in.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now what line were you working for then?

MR. BAKER: I was working for the railroad...

DR. CRAWFORD: Was it the Southern?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I reckon so. I don't remember now.

DR. CRAWFORD: What towns did they have you working at?

MR. BAKER: Well, Selmer was our home town. We went down that railroad down to Corinth, Mississippi and further on down and back up to Jackson. Along there.

DR. CRAWFORD: They used a lot of wood then. Didn't use much iron did they?

MR. BAKER: No.



DR. CRAWFORD: Did you work on depots and bridges both?

MR. BAKER: No, it was depots most all the time was what I did, and worked on.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have other crews to work on the bridges?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I guess they do. We just worked on depots.

Do any repair work that they had to do and paint them and do things like that. And the water towers, I'd get on up around that water tank around there where they used the... I don't know if they have water tanks now or not. Whether they use water for their engines.

DR. CRAWFORD: No, I think when they changed from steam engines they didn't need water towers and began to close them down. Were they made out of wood then -- the water towers?

MR. BAKER: Yes, they were made out of wood. It was up high. It was kind of up high and you had to get up there and go all around them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now how did they get the water in the locomotive... In the tank?

MR. BAKER: Well they had it piped, run over there and put it in through that pipe.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now how did they pump it into the locomotive boiler?

MR. BAKER: I don't know. They had a hose, some way. I just don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have some kind of arm the hose was on that would swing out?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Swing out over the thing there and pour the



water in.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was pretty complicated. They had to keep water and they had to keep coal all along the road, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And the bridges were made out of wood?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they ever have any fires?

MR. BAKER: Fires?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. Did the bridges ever burn?

MR. BAKER: Well, not that I know of. I don't know of any that burned.

DR. CRAWFORD: I remember some of the depots. Were they all painted a certain color?

MR. BAKER: I don't know whether they were a certain color. I just don't remember what color they were now.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems to me that they all looked alike, but I can't remember what color it was.

MR. BAKER: I don't remember what color they were.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now that was for a little while before you moved to Memphis, wasn't it, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: Yes, that was before I moved to Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: You didn't do any of that after?

MR. BAKER: No. I did none of that after I moved to Memphis. When I moved to Memphis I got a job in a grocery store. Went to work in a grocery store. Stayed in that all the rest of the time.



DR. CRAWFORD: Well did you like working for the railroad?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I liked it all right. It was all right.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had to travel quite a lot to different towns, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: We had those boxcars and we'd stop one place and work there on the depots and everthing there painting them around until we got through there and then we'd move the cars on to the next station.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you do on weekends? Did they move the cars back home? How did you get home on weekends?

MR. BAKER: Yes, we'd just get out and go home. I don't remember. I just don't remember too much about it now, it's been so long ago.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you do in the evenings when you were in all those towns? Was there anything to do or did you read or visit around?

MR. BAKER: We just worked there along through the day and then got in those boxcars and slept at night. We would eat there too. We had a cook in one of the cars. Had our meals there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, they had stoves and tables in one of the cars, didn't they, the dining car.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember anything about the food?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember. Just ordinary food, something to eat. Just whatever we had. I don't remember what there was now.



DR. CRAWFORD: Well had you ever thought about working in a grocery store before you came to Memphis?

MR. BAKER: No, I never thought about it. When I first come to Memphis I was looking for a carpenter's job. I thought I could get a job as a carpenter, and I went around to several places where I saw them building, but I never could find anybody who would talk to me about hiring me. So I finally got me a job in a grocery store. Went to work there, and worked on until finally Malone and Hyde fixed me up a store... sold me one. Sold me a little store. And I went to work then in my own little store.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they supplied everything you needed.

MR. BAKER: Yes, they supplied all the stuff in there and let me go without paying them for it for a long time. Just let me go paying them just a little at a time along. I didn't have money to start on, but they put me in there and stocked up the store, everything in there, and charged it to me, of course. When I would sell out anything they would supply, they kept me supplied. I paid them just a little bit along as I had the money until finally I got it paid for.

DR. CRAWFORD: And then you were on your own and could make a profit, couldn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes, that's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember how long that took, to break even?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember how long it was now. I don't know how long it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: How often did Malone and Hyde deliver things to

you? Did they come around daily then?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember whether they did. No, not daily, I think. We would call up and order anything we wanted and they would deliver it then.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess they used a truck for delivery, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes, they had a truck for delivery. Most everthing was trucks then. They didn't have many automobiles running over the streets like they have now. We had horses and wagons. And I was in the grocery business for a long time [when] we had horses, a couple of horses, and a stall back of the store there where we kept those horses and a wagon that delivered groceries. With a horse and wagon.

DR. CRAWFORD: You did your delivery by wagon.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what year that was, Mr. Baker? How long that was?

MR. BAKER: I just don't remember what year it was. I just don't remember.

BEN BAKER: It was about 1924 or '25 or '23.

DR. CRAWFORD: Still using horses and wagons to deliver in the twenties. You know you'd see a lot of them around in the thirties, even.

BEN BAKER: I can remember back in the twenties when they'd go down on Sunday and feed the horse. You know, the stores... there wasn't anything open on Sundays. And they had a couple of horses out in back of the, in the stable in back of

the store, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they had to be fed and watered, I guess.

BEN BAKER: That's right. On Sunday. And they'd go down,
that was in the twenties.

[Brief gap in tape]

DR. CRAWFORD: Now that was heavy wood they used in the barrels
of flour, wasn't it?

BEN BAKER: Yes. But he had a man who used to, do you remember
him, Pop? He used to could pick up a barrel of
flour and put it on his shoulders. Can you remember that?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember about that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well he had to be pretty strong.

BEN BAKER: Yes, he did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because it was heavy and it was awkward, too,
wasn't it?

BEN BAKER: Yes, and I can't remember what one of those
barrels of flour would weigh, but they were heavy.
But like you said, even in the early thirties, they could still
get flour by the barrel, in the wooden barrels. But I'll bet you
it must have played out pretty soon after that.

DR. CRAWFORD: They started putting it in sacks?

BEN BAKER: Well we had... J.D. was my oldest son at that time
and he delivered groceries for me, carried them
around. He had a little wagon he pulled around and would load his
groceries on that to carry out. And one day he went out with a



load of groceries down the street to deliver it to somebody and some man stopped him on the street and just picked them all up out of the wagon and walked off with them and he couldn't do anything about it.

DR. CRAWFORD: He wasn't big enough to.

[Gap in tape]

BEN BAKER: If he could pick up a barrel of flour and put it on his shoulder, he had to be pretty strong.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Oh yes, yes.

BEN BAKER: Because they, like you said, weighed at least a hundred and sixty pounds, isn't that what you said?

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was the normal weight now for a barrel of flour?

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Well the whole thing weighed a hundred and sixty pounds, I think.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was a load for a strong man.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Right, right, right. But the flour more than likely was about a hundred and forty. Those barrels were big and thick. Yes. And I read somewhere the reason they got out of the barrels, I knew a man that was in the cooperage business. Mr. Tompkins of our church, died years ago. He was in the cooperage business. And the barrels almost broke him, because he sold barrels to different people.

BEN BAKER: Yes.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Oh yes. You could get pickles and you could get flour and you could get a lot of other stuff. The reason I was discussing this is, Dr. Crawford, I've heard Mr. Baker. He and I have visited before and I've heard him tell me a lot of these stories and I was just bringing up a couple of things that you might want to ask. The time frame is very important. Somebody who reads this or hears this fifty years from now might say, "You mean they had horses and wagons that delivered groceries? Now it's all electronic." So you know, where was your first store, over there on Barksdale?

BEN BAKER: Oh, yes, but where he first worked and where I can remember the horses, over at Chelsea and Breedlove. That's in north Memphis.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Okay. Now the next one, though, over behind the store where you last left, the last store you worked at, you know, over at Barksdale and Nelson?

BEN BAKER: Yes, right.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Okay, behind that, I meant part of your storeroom used to be a stable or a garage?

BEN BAKER: Well there used to be a service station there.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Okay.

BEN BAKER: Yes, right. There used to be a service station.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: And you took that in?

BEN BAKER: Yes, right. That was back when that service station, gosh, that was one of the first service stations, you know, before they put them on corners, they had it



next to the building there. Just a little drive in there, see? When they first started out with service stations, they didn't think about that they had to be on a corner, you know that.

DR. CRAWFORD: How easy it was to get in or out, that came later.

BEN BAKER: Yes, right.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: J.D. was named after you, of course, right? He was your oldest son, right?

MR. BAKER: Yes, yes.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: You had five sons? And Ben is the youngest?

MR. BAKER: J.D. is the oldest and Ben is next.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Oh, Ben is next. Well all five of your sons worked in the grocery business, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes, yes.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Did you encourage them or did they just get into the business because you were in it?

MR. BAKER: They were willing to work.

BEN BAKER: [Laughing] That was all we knew.

DR. CRAWFORD: You started early, didn't you?

BEN BAKER: Yes, right.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: This brings out how he progressed to the Baker Brothers. Now in the telephone book, how is it listed? Baker and Sons Groceries?

BEN BAKER: Now I think it's Big Star now. I don't know how they list it in the phone book.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: If you look up Baker, I thought it said Baker and Sons?

BEN BAKER: No, I don't think so.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: That was a couple of years ago.

DR. CRAWFORD: That might have been earlier.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: No, I'm talking about a couple of years ago it was still listed in the telephone directory, in the yellow pages. Have you looked?

BEN BAKER: I haven't looked lately. I don't know.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: I'd be interested to know. Because it started out as Baker and Sons after a while, didn't it?

BEN BAKER: Baker Brothers.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Baker Brothers. Because see, when he started out, it was his brother, Pat Baker.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Oh, well see, we didn't know that. You had a brother that came down here. You taught school before you became a carpenter, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Oh, okay. I didn't know whether...

BEN BAKER: Yes, that was when he started out. Uncle Pat, he was older than you, wasn't he, Pop?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

BEN BAKER: A little bit older. A few years older. He knew Mr. Hyde and had dealings with Mr. Hyde, didn't he, Pop?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you moved to Memphis, Mr. Baker, your brother Pat was already here.

MR. BAKER: Yes.



DR. CRAWFORD: And was he in the grocery business?

MR. BAKER: Well he worked for Malone and Hyde in the wholesale business. And that's the way I got in. He helped me. It was through his influence that got me started in the grocery business. Malone and Hyde started me in and I didn't have nothing at all to pay them at all. They just stocked up the groceries to the small store there and stocked it up with the groceries and all and charged them all to me and let me get in there and start and as I would sell, I'd pay them a little bit along, every week or so.

BEN BAKER: How much did the stock of groceries run then. Do you remember? Wasn't it about three or four hundred dollars?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember what it was, but groceries were awfully cheap then.

BEN BAKER: Yes.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Wages were awful low, then too, weren't they?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, that was quite a bit of money then. It wasn't easy to get.

MR. BAKER: We sold lots of things for a nickel or a dime.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: And a day laborer made fifty cents a day if he was lucky, right?

BEN BAKER: I think they could stock a store for about five hundred dollars.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Well this is so interesting Mr. Baker that I hate to miss out on any of it, but I just wanted to interject a couple of things here, some questions, you know,



because he's been in the business so long and we've already interviewed Ben and Ben was in the business. I remember going in the grocery store one day about four or five years ago and this lady came in there, an elderly lady, now, and said, "Ben, I remember when you were that big, working behind the counter." You remember he used to work in the store when he was little. Whatever you could find for him to do to keep him out of the cookie jar, you'd work him, wouldn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes. [Laughter]

MAJ. SCHULTZE: But you had five fine sons, and I've had the privilege of knowing one of them a long time. I guess about twenty years, now, hasn't it?

BEN BAKER: Yes.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: And he and I hit it off pretty well. But then, he's a chip off the old block. But they'll never learn as much as you learned the hard way, down at the bottom of the heap. And not too many people can go into business with somebody else for five hundred dollars and turn out to have a half a dozen big stores in Memphis.

I've got this appointment. I promised a man I would take him up to the courthouse this morning. He doesn't like to drive downtown and he's an elderly friend of mine and I'm going to run off for a little while, but if you get tired, you just tell Dr. Crawford. We'd like to come back and see you. Maybe tomorrow, because this is really going to be good for the History Department -- I meant the Oral History section of it -- and then it goes in the archives. What is the name of that? Mississippi?



DR. CRAWFORD: Mississippi Valley Archives.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Mississippi Valley Archives, which Memphis State is the depositor for. Depository, whatever the term you use.

DR. CRAWFORD: Be careful, Ben. Don't get a ticket on the way down.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Yes. Don't tire out Mr. Baker too much. Any time you want to quit, you go ahead. I'll see if I can run over this afternoon or tomorrow and see your wife. I'm not going to tell her we visited you, though. Don't you tell her either, okay.

DR. CRAWFORD: We won't go too long, Ben, because maybe you could bring us back tomorrow, too.

MAJ. SCHULTZE: Yes, yes. Good.

DR. CRAWFORD: So we won't go until Mr. Baker gets too tired. Now your brother worked for Malone and Hyde, so you had a contact already.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Which Mr. Hyde was this?

MR. BAKER: Mr. Hyde senior, I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because the family is still in business, several generations later.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: But this is the one who was active in the nineteen twenties and thirties. Where were their headquarters then?

MR. BAKER: I really don't know.



DR. CRAWFORD: I think it was downtown, but I am not sure of the address.

MR. BAKER: I'm not sure. I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they made deliveries to you with one of their Malone and Hyde trucks, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes, I could just call up and give them a little order for all I needed, anything I needed, and they would send it out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that telephone was pretty good, then, wasn't it.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Had you had telephones before you moved to Memphis?

MR. BAKER: No, I guess not. I don't know. I guess we had telephones. I don't remember when, now, but we used to have telephones out in the country there, when I lived out in the country. We had telephones. I remember when the night would come, if a cloud came up or anything like that, we unhooked the line and turned it loose.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was because of lightning, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: Yes, on account of lightning.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because you didn't want that lightning coming in the house.

MR. BAKER: That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you would notice things like that. Now when you got to Memphis, things looked a lot different, didn't they?



MR. BAKER: Oh, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had streetcars here then?

MR. BAKER: Streetcars? Yes, they had some kind of car, not like they are now, though. Different. They had some kind of cars.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you think of the stores in Memphis, Mr. Baker? I know they were different. They must have looked a lot bigger, didn't they?

MR. BAKER: Well they were a lot different from what they are now, of course. Well, just a small store that I was in, just a small store but everything was cheap, then. All of the groceries were cheap. Sold lots of stuff for less than a nickel. Three or four cents for some things.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you had a big penny and nickel section in the cash register, then, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: A big what?

DR. CRAWFORD: A big place for pennies and nickels.

MR. BAKER: Oh, yes. We had one drawer for pennies and one for nickels and one for quarters and one for dimes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And then you'd get paper money.

MR. BAKER: And then paper money. Dollars.

DR. CRAWFORD: How often would you count up receipts? At the end of the day?

MR. BAKER: Yes, we'd count up at the end of every day and see what we'd done and what we'd took in for that day. Then I went down to Malone and Hyde's. We had a meeting. I'd go down once every week, down to the office where they had the



meeting -- the Malone and Hyde meeting.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you sell much on credit then?

MR. BAKER: Well, we did sell a little bit, had a few customers that we'd sell some on credit for a little while.

DR. CRAWFORD: But was it mostly cash?

MR. BAKER: Most of it was cash. But we did have a few customers that lived right there close to the store that we'd sell on credit to along. They'd come in and buy stuff on the credit for about four or five days and at the end of the week they'd pay for it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you didn't give very long credit, then. It was not for a whole month.

MR. BAKER: No, we didn't. No. Not long credit. Just a little while.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you never had a lot of money tied up.

MR. BAKER: No sir. Just for the week. That's all. Just let them have a little bit along for the week. At the end of the week, they'd be working somewhere, you know. At the end of the week they'd get paid and they'd come in and pay their grocery bill.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you didn't have a lot in accounts recievable, then, did you?

MR. BAKER: No, not much.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that made it easier.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you accept checks in payment?

MR. BAKER: Yes, I think we did accept checks. If it was



somebody we knew. We had to know them well.

DR. CRAWFORD: What were the banks in town then?

MR. BAKER: What were they?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. Union Planters was one then, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: I just don't know. I didn't use a bank. At that time, I didn't use a bank at all.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well what did you do with your profit from the business?

MR. BAKER: I paid it to Malone and Hyde for what I owed them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Until it was all paid off?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And then you were out of debt?

MR. BAKER: Yes. I paid them off until I got that. Then we got a bank account. Go to the bank and make a deposit every week.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what bank you used?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't remember now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well when did you buy your first car? Do you remember the first one?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember when it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what kind it was?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't know what brand it was.

BEN BAKER: Model T, wasn't it?

MR. BAKER: I just don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's what a lot of people started with, unless they had to wait and start with a Model A.

BEN BAKER: I can remember the Model T's.



DR. CRAWFORD: I can remember then, and although I never had to do it, I can remember people having to crank them.

BEN BAKER: Yes, right. I can remember that. Get out and crank them. They would say to be careful because it could break your arm.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had to hold it a certain way, didn't you?

BEN BAKER: Yes. And when it would catch, you know, it would stop, wouldn't it, Pop, and throw your arm back and you'd have to watch it. Some way when they would turn it around.

DR. CRAWFORD: It would kick over, I think.

BEN BAKER: And that would stop that handle right quick and if you're not careful, it would... I think some people were getting their arms broken sometimes that way.

DR. CRAWFORD: But what about this delivery you did? You kept a horse and wagon. Did you have one horse or did you have a pair of them?

MR. BAKER: I had just one horse, I believe. Just one horse, I think, was what we had.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did you keep the stable?

MR. BAKER: Well it was right by the store, right close to the store, right next to it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that usual? Did a lot of businesses keep stables then?

MR. BAKER: Yes, yes. They kept horses. There wasn't many cars running around on the streets then like there is now. You would see one car once in a while.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I guess that was a one-horse wagon.



MR. BAKER: Just a one-horse wagon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who did the delivery for you? I know you probably had to stay in the store.

MR. BAKER: Yes, I just had a boy there that could go out and harness up the horse and hitch him to the wagon.

One of the clerks could do that. Carry the groceries down to wherever they belonged, wherever they wanted them to go. And then a lot of times, we just had... We didn't have a horse all of the time, and a wagon. Part of the time we just had some, the boys that worked there, little boys, had a little wagon they would pull down the street.

DR. CRAWFORD: Had a child's wagon they would pull.

MR. BAKER: Yes. Put the groceries in that and they would walk down, pull it down to the street where it wanted to go. Just somewhere right around in the neighborhood, you know. Close around. I remember one time my oldest son J.D. had the little wagon and he loaded it up with groceries going down to deliver it and he got down somewhere before he got to the place where he was going, some man walked up to the wagon there and just picked up his sacks of groceries and walked off with them.

DR. CRAWFORD: He did not know who it was, did he?

MR. BAKER: No, he didn't know who it was. He come back and brought his wagon back and come back and reported that somebody... And I called the police and told them, but the police couldn't do nothing because they didn't know who it was, had no idea of who it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: You did not deliver very far.



MR. BAKER: No, it wasn't very far. Just close around. Right around the neighborhood. Close around.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were there a lot of horses and wagons in Memphis then?

MR. BAKER: Yes, there were a lot of them. There weren't many automobiles, just a lot of horses and wagons.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were the streets all paved then, or just part of them?

MR. BAKER: Well, I don't know. Most of them were paved, I reckon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now something I wonder, Mr. Baker. Who cleaned up the streets then, behind all of those horses?

MR. BAKER: I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: I wonder if they had a street department then to do that. Because, you know, people forget.

MR. BAKER: I don't know how they did that, but I can remember them having horses.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I know for a long time, people kept a lot of horses in town, and then they started, City Government, started stopping them. I think maybe first they stopped private owners and then I think maybe last of all they stopped business. I'm not sure when that was.

BEN BAKER: Back in the early thirties, we were still having live chickens at the store. You can remember that, Pop. Back in the early thirties we were still having live chickens. We had them in the coop.



DR. CRAWFORD: Well now, how would they be sold, Mr. Baker? Would you kill the chicken and pluck it and cut it up there or would they just take the chicken away live?

BEN BAKER: No, they'd dress it in the store. They had hot water in the back and they would break their neck and then dip them down in hot water and pick them right there in the store, in the back room.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would the customer do that?

BEN BAKER: No, the butcher... the clerk.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that was one way to be sure you got fresh meat. There wasn't any doubt about it.

BEN BAKER: That's right. They'd come down and pick out their chicken.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you sell them by the pound or by the chicken?

BEN BAKER: I don't remember. How did we sell them, then?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember.

BEN BAKER: I don't really know whether they weighed them alive or whether they after they dressed them weighed them. I just don't remember that much about it, but I do remember our having live chickens. That was nineteen thirty-one, thirty-two...

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you know for a while, with that delivery by wagon, wagons started looking a little different. Did they look any different when you came to Memphis with what they did in the country?

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Same kind?



MR. BAKER: Same kind, I think.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you see any rubber wheels on wagons?
Automobile wheels?

MR. BAKER: I just don't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems like they were using them for a while, in
the thirties or so.

BEN BAKER: Yes. I think the Clover Farm Dairy... Didn't they
have on their milk trucks... Didn't you work on
them, one time, Pop? One time?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember.

BEN BAKER: Clover Farm Dairy, and they would have big rubber
tires. And they would have the horses pull them?

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now for a while in the thirties, people
started taking wheels off cars, if they couldn't
afford to drive the car, and put them on wagons. Some people
called them Hoovermobiles.

BEN BAKER: Because that was when Hoover was in office, I
guess, wasn't it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, when the Depression started.

BEN BAKER: Hoovermobiles. I hadn't heard that. But I can
remember seeing those... Probably there was...

Wheels off of cars.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, now they did some of that. And the dairy that
delivered to you, was that Clover Farm then?

BEN BAKER: Clover Farm. That was the name of it. Clover Farm
Dairy. Sealtest bought them out, later on. But
they started out as Clover Farm Dairy.



DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have a green clover on their milk bottles?

BEN BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now did the dairy deliver? You sold milk, too, didn't you?

MR. BAKER: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And the dairy would deliver that each morning.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now how early did deliveries start? How often did you have to open the store?

MR. BAKER: Well, they started real early. I don't remember just what time, now. Time we'd open the store.

They'd be right there to deliver, on some of those things.

BEN BAKER: Well didn't you used to get down by five o'clock in the morning?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

BEN BAKER: And meet the milk truck there?

MR. BAKER: Get down there and open up for the delivery before we opened the store for customers.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well I know they would deliver from the dairy real early. I guess the Malone and Hyde truck and other things would come around later in the day.

BEN BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well your customers, some of them would drive up in cars. You didn't ever think about parking space, then, did you?

MR. BAKER: No.



DR. CRAWFORD: They just parked wherever they could.

BEN BAKER: On the street, yes. There were so few of them, then, and they built the stores right at the street.

MR. BAKER: Yes, and back then there wasn't many cars out. People didn't have cars.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now Mr. Crump had a law passed that made it illegal to blow horns, but I guess that was later. They could probably blow horns at this time.

BEN BAKER: Yes, that was in the... I've forgotten now. I guess Mr. Crump had Joe Boyle, who used to be the Commissioner here.

DR. CRAWFORD: Holy Joe, they called him.

BEN BAKER: Yes, and he wanted to enforce the ordinance or had it passed or something, about no horn-blowing.

And it quieted everybody down. They didn't blow their horns. That must have been in the early forties. It might have been in the thirties.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think Mr. Boyle came in as Commissioner maybe in the late thirties and in the forties because they were having to deal with the naval base at Millington and clean up town for that. So I think that was about the time.

BEN BAKER: Yes, it seems like that was when it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well did World War II bring any changes for you, Mr. Baker, in the store business? Did you have to deal with rationing and was it hard to get things?

MR. BAKER: I don't remember whether it was.



DR. CRAWFORD: I know they had rationing, but I didn't know. I guess the stores collected coupons.

BEN BAKER: Yes, right. We had rationing coupons. I can remember that.

DR. CRAWFORD: And people could buy only so much of anything, couldn't they?

BEN BAKER: That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did it get hard to get meat and things like that during the war?

BEN BAKER: Yes, right. It was hard to get. And cigarettes was one thing that was real hard to get.

DR. CRAWFORD: I had forgotten that they rationed cigarettes.

BEN BAKER: Yes. They were all going overseas, they'd say. You know, the cigarettes. And they were at a premium.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, what else was hard to get in that time? I know cigarettes, the meat...

BEN BAKER: Yes, they were rationing meat.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they run short on coffee or anything they had to bring in from other countries?

BEN BAKER: Coffee coupons, they had to have a coupon to buy coffee with. You know, they rationed coffee, and shoes, they had shoe coupons. Gasoline rationing.

DR. CRAWFORD: You didn't sell gasoline, did you?

BEN BAKER: No.

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now let's see. Did you handle shoes or any dry



goods?

BEN BAKER: We handled kerosene. Coal oil, we called it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that rationed, too?

BEN BAKER: Well actually, it had played out when World War II started, as far as people using it in their homes and cooking and all. You know, back in the twenties and thirties, they used to cook with kerosene.

DR. CRAWFORD: They used it a lot for lamps, too.

BEN BAKER: Yes, right. And all of the grocery stores handled kerosene. You know, they'd order a one gallon can or a five gallon can of kerosene. And all of the stores had a kerosene drum in the back and they'd draw that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would people bring their own jug or something to carry it in?

BEN BAKER: Well a lot of times they did, but I think the store had three or four cans and they'd deliver it in that and pour it out in their stove or whatnot, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: They did a lot of delivery then.

MR. BAKER: We had big barrels of molasses then. A big barrel of molasses, and they'd draw out a little in a bucket or cup or something and sell it like that, just small quantities.

DR. CRAWFORD: You kept a lot of things in bulk then that weren't packaged. Molasses and flour and kerosene and what else?

MR. BAKER: Meal...

BEN BAKER: We had meal and sugar...



MR. BAKER: Sugar and coffee, we weighed that up in little bags.

BEN BAKER: At the store.

MR. BAKER: At the store, and sold it.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was not all packaged, then?

MR. BAKER: No, it wasn't packaged.

BEN BAKER: There weren't very many packages of anything. Even cookies. They'd get cookies in big caddies, they called them.

MR. BAKER: We even weighed up meal and flour and stuff like that in little bags and had it stacked back in the store, a little bag of flour, a little meal, with some price on it.

BEN BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: So if they wanted five pounds or ten pounds of something, you'd have a sack ready.

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you have seen a lot of change in the business. A lot of it has been in the packaging industry, hasn't it? That has really grown.

BEN BAKER: Yes. They package just about everything now. I don't think there's anything...

DR. CRAWFORD: Well it seems to me that they waste a lot when they do. They have to use a lot of paper and plastic and other things, but I guess it's cheaper in the long run. A lot of that used to be in wood, didn't it? It seems to me like I remember you would get a lot of wooden boxes for different



things.

BEN BAKER: You would. Oranges used to come in wooden boxes, apples, and all of them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Fruit?

BEN BAKER: I guess from California, it was coming. But they didn't have much except at Christmas time.

DR. CRAWFORD: And cheese came in wooden boxes?

BEN BAKER: Yes, right. Wooden hoops. Round hoop cheese, they called it. Yes, you would get quite a bit of things in wood then. I can remember corned beef coming up from Brazil or wherever. I guess they were coming up from there.

Corned beef would come in those wooden cases. Even after they had stopped using so much wood. They still used wood for that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now what about the sizes of canned things? They didn't have as many different sizes then, did they?

MR. BAKER: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: By the time you left the grocery business, it had changed a lot, hadn't it, Mr. Baker?

MR. BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What were the changes you noticed most?

MR. BAKER: In what now?

DR. CRAWFORD: What changes looked most different to you?

MR. BAKER: In the grocery business?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, by the time you left. Because I know it was not the way it was when you moved to Memphis.

BEN BAKER: Yes, from the time you started to the time you



stopped.

MR. BAKER: Oh well, there was a lot that was different then.

DR. CRAWFORD: You would really have been surprised if you could have seen it when you first came, the way it turned out, wouldn't you?

MR. BAKER: Yes. Yes, we had stuff that was all different. We had to weigh that little stuff, meal and flour, sugar and coffee and all that. We had to weigh it in little bags, little packages, and have it stacked on the shelf, a dime, fifteen, or twenty cents worth. Everything was cheap, then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would you do that in your spare time, when you didn't have customers?

MR. BAKER: Yes, that's right. Have it sacked up and ready there, waiting.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were pretty much busy all the time there, then. There was a lot of work in groceries.

MR. BAKER: Well, you weren't waiting on the customer all of the time. Sometimes while you didn't have a customer waiting on, you'd be doing something like that. Sacking up something or other, getting it ready.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have many people who stayed in your store? Did you keep a stove in there? Did some people sort of hang out at the store?

MR. BAKER: No, I don't know that they did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yours was mostly for business, then.

MR. BAKER: Yes. They'd just come in, buy something, whatever they wanted, and go right on out. They didn't



stay.

BEN BAKER: I believe the biggest change in the grocery business has been self-service. Back in those days, you waited on everybody that came in the store.

MR. BAKER: That's right.

BEN BAKER: And now they all wait on themselves.

MR. BAKER: That's right. In the store we had a counter right across the front of the store there, and the customers didn't go behind there to get anything. They'd come in. "Give me a so-and-so. A package of this. A package of that."

DR. CRAWFORD: And you'd put it out there for them.

MR. BAKER: And you'd run and get it and put it on the shelf. And they'd call for something else. And you'd go and get it and put it down there until they would get all that they wanted down there, and then you'd add it up and collect for it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well when self-service came in, was there any doubt about it? Did people think customers would steal too much if they let them go back there?

BEN BAKER: You know, I think Clarence Saunders started that, and that was in the twenties, I think. In the late twenties, I'd say. I don't know when the first Piggly-Wiggly started. But I don't know how they felt about self-service. I know when they first started self-service meat, and that was in the forties, they didn't think that was going to go over. People wouldn't buy meat already packaged up. They wanted to see it cut in the store, you know. But now, they don't think anything of it,



to get packaged meat.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, people accept changes. But you know, there are a few people now who sort of want to go back the other way. Like to see it cut up and order it specially.

BEN BAKER: That's right. That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess things come and go a little, but most of it is packaging now.

BEN BAKER: The biggest part of it, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: And it makes a lot of sense, in a way, when people work and are busy to be able to go in and go right through and get what they want and not have to put your order in and have it brought to you and everything.

BEN BAKER: That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: But that home delivery service, I wonder if that's going to come back? Do you think there will be a demand for that again?

BEN BAKER: I don't believe so.

DR. CRAWFORD: The transportation cost could be kind of hard to pay off.

BEN BAKER: It would be real expensive. You know, I think that it's so competitive now, in all of the businesses now.

MR. BAKER: Yes, in those days a customer would call up and order so-and-so. We had to get it up and go carry it to them.

DR. CRAWFORD: They didn't even have to leave their home. They could pick up the telephone and place their order.



And would they pay your delivery man, then?

MR. BAKER: Pay the delivery man when he got down there with it yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well that sure was easy, but I can see how it would be expensive and how it would mean a lot more people working.

BEN BAKER: Yes. And we were doing that up until World War II, so that was about nineteen forty.

MR. BAKER: I remember when I first started in a grocery store, I was working for somebody else for a little while before I got in business for myself. And we would get customers to call up and order stuff and I would go get it up and carry it to them. I carried it out, lots of times, myself. I remember one time I went and knocked on the door and delivered the groceries they had ordered. She was going, "Bring them in, bring them on back here to the kitchen." I went on back and carried them on back to the kitchen and put them on the table, sorted them all out, collected for them. And I started to go out the side door there. I started to open the door, "Oh, don't you go out my side door. You go out the door you come in at. [Laughter] It's wrong to do that."

BEN BAKER: She was superstitious, wasn't she?

MR. BAKER: Yes, she was superstitious.

BEN BAKER: I've heard that too. "Go back and go out the same door you come in at."

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you know, I guess it was a manpower shortage in World War II that sort of put an end to a lot



of those things.

BEN BAKER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because I know it got hard to find people to do anything.

BEN BAKER: That's right. That's what changed everything -- the war.

DR. CRAWFORD: And when people came back, it never went back where it was. It just changed even more.

BEN BAKER: That's right. It was changed forever.



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